

The Denver Unity Meeting (4)
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Vol. 79, No. 40, Oct 2, 1962

During the Unity Meeting in Denver in July Bro. Carl Ketcherside (hereafter called Bro. K.) had much to say about unity. He said "the unity of the Bible is not one of blind conformity, but of diversity. Differences are normal and people are to be accepted in spite of their differences. . . . Unity in diversity is the only kind of unity possible." We are inclined to agree that there is diversity in unity, but we do not believe there is room for as much diversity as he allows. Another statement will make his point clearer:

"In Christ Jesus there is room for men to believe different things and they've got to welcome each other in spite of the fact they believe different things. Brethren, the unity of the faith, and the one faith, is faith in the Sonship and Messiahship of Jesus. And inside that faith, which is the unifying faith, there is room for all manner of differences."

Bro. K. then turns to Eph. 5:28-33 where Paul uses the husband-wife relationship to teach us the relationship between Jesus and his church. He insists that husband and wife must be different in their physical make-up in order to become one flesh, one body, which, of course, is true. He then concludes that this proves that there must be diversity of belief and practice before there can be unity in the one spiritual body. If this be true, one wonders why he is spending so much time and effort trying to get the 24 (?) factions of the church to forget their differences in doctrine and practice.

Is there actually diversity in unity? Yes, there must be. Even in the godhead there is unity with diversity. And this unity between the Father and the Son serves as a pattern for the unity of believers, for Jesus prayed that we may be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:21, 22). First, there is diversity of office. The first person of the godhead has the office of Father; the second person has the office of Son. Next, there is diversity of function. The Father did not become flesh and dwell among us, nor did he die for us. The Son did not send the Father to do his will. So there is diversity of function. But is there diversity of doctrine and practice in the godhead? Jesus said his teaching was not his own, but the Father gave him a commandment what he should teach (John 12:49, 50). He spoke the Father's will; he revealed the Father's mind; there is absolute unity between the Father and Son in the matter of doctrine. Next, Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner" (John 5:19). There is absolute unity between the Son and the Father in the things they do. Now, if this unity which characterizes the Father and the Son is a pattern for the unity among believers, it follows that there may be diversity of office and function, but not diversity in belief and practice without offence to the Father and the Son. And this we find to be the truth as taught in the scriptures.

In the one spiritual body, the church over which Jesus is head, there is a diversity of gifts (1 Cor. 12:4). This had reference to the miraculous gifts, which are named in this context. But in Eph. 4:7-12, we find mentioned the gifts which were given to preserve the unity of the Spirit and to attain the unity of the faith. These gifts remain with us today, two of them being in the writing of apostles and prophets. They are with us just as surely on the rich man's brothers had Moses and the prophets (Luke 16:29).

Next, there is a diversity of function in the one body of Christ. In 1 Cor. 12:12ff, Paul teaches that different members of the physical body perform different functions. The body cannot be all eye, ear, or nose. All different parts serve to perform their peculiar functions, but when working together they form one unified body. So, he says, is the church; it is the body of Christ and we as individuals are the several members with our different and peculiar functions. So there is diversity of office and function in the spiritual body, like there is in the godhead, but where is our authority for difference in doctrine and practice?

Bro. K. thinks he has found authority for different belief and practice in Rom. 14. In this place Paul says, "One man hath faith to eat all things; but he that is weak eateth herbs (v. 1). Bro. K. reads this verse correctly, but I have copied his words from the tape as he preaches it this way: "One man believes he can eat all things, but another man believes he can eat only herbs." Now, since belief comes from hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17), the first man can believe he can eat all things; but the second man in the verse cannot believe he can eat only herbs, and Paul did not affirm that he does believe such. It was his opinion; not his belief. But Bro. K. says we are to accept the brother in spite of his incorrect opinion and not set him at naught. That is right. But does this prove that there should, or may, be diversity of doctrine and practice in the body in order to have unity? Diversity of opinion is allowed, not authorized, much less encouraged, in the one body as long as it is in the same class as eating meats and herbs, held as private property, and not exercised in such way as to be imposed as a rule of conduct upon the whole body. In Romans 14, Paul is regulating individual and private conduct of members of the body, not the doctrines and practices of the corporate body. Bro. K. puts use of musical instruments in worship and "all manner of differences" in belief and practice in the class with meats and herbs. His mistake consists in two things: (1) in thinking the use of musical instruments in worship is in the class with eating meat and herbs, a matter of indifference instead of a matter in which we are to walk by faith; (2) in thinking a man, or a group of people, can bring a private opinion into the congregation and impose it upon all the congregation as a rule of worship. Whether he eats meat, or herbs, or both, is a man's own private individual affair; but whether he can impose his personal desire for musical instruments upon the congregation is not his private affair.

What is the unity which Paul taught? First, it is unity of organization—"no divisions among you" (1 Cor. 1:10). The grouping of themselves under leaders such as Paul and Peter was dangerous in that it might grow into sects, such divisions as would not permit worship in one body. So the unity Paul required involves ability to worship together.

Next, Paul required unity of speech—"that ye all speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10). Bro. K. says this is not necessary, that different doctrines do not destroy fellowship. Peter says we are all to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). And Paul condemns the teaching of any different doctrine and demands that we withdraw ourselves from those who so teach (1 Tim. 6:3-5). Though we are to "admonish him as a brother," it still remains a fact that we are to "have no company with him" (2 Thess. 3:14).

Last, Paul required unity of mind—"be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). Thayer defines the Greek word for judgment to mean "view, judgment, opinion." Vine says the word means "judgment, opinion." Vincent says the words for mind and judgment in this verse may be taken to mean "understanding and opinion." Paul says we are to "stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). This does not look like Paul allowed, much less encouraged, every one to bring his private opinions and teach them to the congregation, much less to impose them upon the assembly as a way of worship. Again, Paul said that "ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Phil. 2:2). Unity of speech can be attained only when we have come to a unity of mind. And unity of organization depends on our attaining the unity of speech. Does this unity of mind disallow the diversity of opinion of Romans 14? 1 Cor. 1:10 is dealing with a congregational problem; Romans 14 is dealing with individual problems. It would be a mistake to impose a congregational rule upon the individual. Or we may look on 1 Cor. 1:10 as the perfect goal, while Romans 14 is a concession made in the realm of the individual.